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C O N F I D E N T I A L HARARE 000171

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR SDELISI, LAROIAN, MRAYNOR
AF/PD FOR DFOLEY, CDALTON
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR JFRAZER, DTEITELBAUM
LONDON FOR CGURNEY
PARIS FOR CNEARY
NAIROBI FOR TPFLAUMER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/28/2009

TAGS: [PREL](#) [CASC](#) [PGOV](#) [Z1](#)

SUBJECT: RULING PARTY PROTESTS TRAVEL ADVISORY, RAISES
POSSIBLE DC VISIT

REF: (A) STATE 15219 (B) 03 HARARE 2236

Classified By: Political Officer Win Dayton under Section 1.5(b)(d)

1. (C) Deputy Director of ZANU-PF's Bureau of External Relations Itai Mach called poloff on January 27 to protest the text of the travel advisory issued by the Department on January 22 (ref A). He charged that it was a politically motivated effort to disrupt Zimbabwe's "recovering" economy with a view to discrediting the ruling party. International media had seized on the advisory to damage Zimbabwe's international image for purposes of tourism and investment. He asserted that the country's security situation was improving and that the government was attaching priority to fostering a favorable atmosphere for tourism and investment. Poloff explained the apolitical purpose of travel advisories generally, highlighted the indisputable facts in the advisory, and noted that the advisory was essentially identical to one issued in January 2003.

2. (C) Mach then renewed his inquiry about the possibility of a ZANU-PF delegation visiting Washington to engage with the USG, members of the Congress, and others interested in Zimbabwe. He did not elaborate on details of the party's intended activities or message other than to convey the party's "side of the story." He asked if waivers would be granted to party members who were subject to travel restrictions but did not name the members wishing to travel.

3. (C) COMMENT: After CNN's treatment of the travel advisory as news, government and independent papers alike played the advisory up here to considerable interest among the public and diplomatic community. For their part, government papers generally parroted Mach's analysis and, weaving in mischaracterizations of Morgan Tsvangirai's treason trial testimony as evidence of CIA involvement in a coup plot, lately have increasingly projected a USG bent on regime change. We view the portrayal more as coincident opportunistic propaganda driven by Information Minister Jonathan Moyo than a concerted effort to alienate the USG further. Nonetheless, suspicions about USG motives remain deep among many ruling party members, and most continue to keep their distance from Americans out of concern for "political correctness" in their insecure liberation party.

4. (C) COMMENT (CONT'D): Mach's approach follows an initial more tentative inquiry last month (ref B). The effort probably reflects more interest in manufacturing trappings of legitimacy for the ruling party than in moving toward resolution of the country's political crisis. There have been signs that the party is interested in rehabilitating its international image -- vocal support among prominent party members for RBZ Chairman Gono's interest in reengaging the IFIs, for example. While we doubt the depth of this interest, we hope to use it in this instance to provoke a more substantive effort on the ruling party's part. Accordingly, we propose to pour cold water on Mach's inquiry with a vague response -- reiterating our seriousness about the travel restrictions and noting the existence of a waiver process without indicating that waivers would be granted in this case. While deflecting the visa issue, we would reiterate our interest in facilitating resolution of Zimbabwe's political crisis but emphasize that meaningful actions by the ruling party indicating its seriousness on that front would enhance prospects for any meaningful dialogue involving the USG. Poloff is scheduled to meet Mach on February 2.

SUL